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ABSTRACT

This document contains a leader's guide for Recording the Hard Times, a program designed to help young people between the ages of 11 and 15 handle the stress in their lives or the stress of their friends. It notes that the workbook is designed to be used in a group setting while the specific recording sessions are designed to be completed individually. The format should give children a chance to record their feelings while working through an organized plan for coping with a problem. Information is provided on how to organize and conduct a session. Warning signs to help leaders determine when a child is under stress are listed and suicide danger signals are noted. Suggestions are provided for speakers and possible topics. A set of stress cards is included which can be used to stimulate group discussions. Two small posters are also provided. (NB)

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Recording the Hard Times

A Leader's Guide

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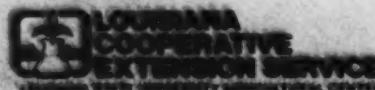
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Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service materials designed to help children under stress:

- Pub. 2330 Recording the Hard Times: A Workbook**
- Pub. 2329 Recording the Hard Times: A Leader's Guide**
- Pub. 2331 Children Under Stress: How Adults Can Help**
- Pub. 2328 Being a Helping Friend**

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Recording the Hard Times

A Leader's Guide

(A workbook to help you or your friends handle stressful times)



Recording the Hard Times is a program designed to help young people (ages 11-15) handle the stress in their lives or that of their friends. Adults can help by becoming aware of the stressors in children's lives, developing the ability to recognize its symptoms and helping them learn appropriate techniques for handling this stress.

The workbook format should give children a chance to record their feelings while working through an organized plan for coping with a problem—whether it be long-term or short-term.

This workbook is designed to be discussed in a group setting. Sharing the learning experiences of this guide in a group increases its value. The specific "recording" sessions are designed to be completed individually. Some of the responses may be personal. You are encouraged to allow kids that privacy. What's important is sharing the experience of participating in the activity with a group and sharing what was learned from it. If this is not possible, one-on-one talks or small groups can still be effective ways of working with kids.

You do not need to have specific counseling skills to conduct a "Recording the Hard Times" session. A genuine interest in and respect for young people are enough. In fact, serious stress problems or counseling needs to be handled by professionals, not by you.

Organizing a "Recording the Hard Times" Session

- Read through the workbook.
- The last two pages of this guide are designed to be small posters. You may want to make others.
- Add your touch to the teaching. Think of examples or additions that might make the topic relevant to the group with whom you are working, especially if you know of a common problem facing a large number of children: unemployment, farm problems, etc.
- Keep in mind that children may be reluctant to talk about their problems. To keep them involved, emphasize the aspect of going through this to help a friend who may be having problems.
- Be confident that you are really doing something important and needed, even if you don't get easily recognized response from the audience.

Conducting the Session

- Have enough workbooks for each child to have one.
- Provide pencils if necessary.
- Allow 30 minutes to one hour for the session. This can be regulated by the amount of discussion and number of examples used. Note that some of the activities take place over a longer time span and are done on their own.
- Lead discussion about points made in leaflet, and review instructions about how to use sections.
- Encourage follow-up sessions if you or the kids desire one.
- Display the posters in the back of this guide in a prominent place after session. You might want to duplicate and add local addresses or telephone numbers.

Added Discussion Activity

- Cut out the stress cards in this booklet. The "front" side of the card lists either a positive idea you can do to feel better or a negative one that might make things worse. The "back" side explains the idea in more detail.
- Use these to stimulate discussion. Kids may read them or give their own explanation of what they think the cards mean before reading the back.

How do you know if a kid is under stress? Here are some warning signs of trouble:

You need to be aware of real trouble signs. Any one of these alone, lasting only a short time, is normal. But if someone has several of these problems lasting more than a couple of weeks, he or she may be nearing a crisis. They need help. These signs can include:

- avoiding friends, activities, school, social events
- totally unable to think of anything but the problem
- unexpected outbursts of anger or crying
- unable to sleep; always feeling exhausted, irritated
- unable to eat; or eating and vomiting
- escaping by sleeping or daydreaming all the time
- severe behavior change—quiet person becoming wild or active person becoming withdrawn
- excessive use of drugs or alcohol

Four other signals should be taken seriously because they are:

Suicide Danger Signals

1. Threatening or talking of killing themselves.
2. Preparing for death—giving away prized possessions, making a will, writing farewell letters, gathering pills or saying goodbye.
3. Talking like there is no hope for the future.
4. Acting or talking like not a single person cares; completely giving up on themselves and others.

Suggestions for Speakers and Possible Topics

Religious Personnel

- involvement in youth church activities
- clearing your conscience
- getting rid of blame
- compassion for others

Psychologist/Counselor

- dealing with your feelings
- getting rid of blame
- clearing your conscience
- handling stressful situations
- techniques to feel in control
- making plans for future instead of dwelling on the past

Kid-to-Kid (perhaps called Heart-to-Heart)

- here's what's going on
- how we can help each other
- techniques to feel in control
- dealing with loss

Extension or Other Professionals

- involvement in youth activities
- dealing with loss
- family activities
- identification of community resources
- discussion of problem (ex. farm situation) in "kid" terms

Use the last page as a poster for:

- classroom bulletin boards
- duplication for individual use
- overhead transparency

Add other resources that you know are available in your area. For example, telephone warm lines, counseling services, support groups, etc.

**"Burning the
candle
at both ends."**

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**"Whose fault
is it, anyway?"**

**"Not knowing
is worse than knowing."**

**"Accentuate
the
Positive."**

Blaming yourself or other people is not a constructive way to deal with a problem. A problem may be more stressful if you think it's your fault. Forgive yourself and move on. We're all human and can make mistakes. Get what help you need so you don't make the same mistake twice. If the problem is caused elsewhere, decide what you can do about it and what you can't. Face facts.

∞

If you're a leader or an in-charge person in your family or at school—watch out for "burn-out."
Not everything that goes wrong is your problem. It may be that you have to let some things or people go at the moment.
Taking care of yourself helps you to take care of others.

A family that works as a team is able to solve problems better. A family that is flexible can manage stress better. Kids can help with housework and perhaps earning money outside the home. Such teamwork and flexibility will help your family make it in spite of stress and trouble.

We can cope with almost anything as long as we have the facts. This is true for losses in your work life as well as personal life. Get as many facts as you can about what has happened to you. Then face those facts head-on.

**"The trick is. . .
to know when to accept
the situation the way it is. . .
and when to change it."**

☺

**"What you see. . .
. . . is what you get."**

**"When the solution becomes
a problem."**

**"After all that has gone wrong,
one more thing might
break the camel's back."**

The way you see the situation affects the amount of stress you feel. A loss for one person may be "dreadful"; for another it is seen only as a minor bother. Many things influence one's perceptions of a situation. Try to look at your perceptions and determine why some situations are stressful for you.

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Knowing when to change or when to accept a situation is a key factor in stress management. Sometimes something happens that is unfortunate, but nothing can be done to change it. Continuing to push for a solution will only add to your stress; but acceptance of the situation will lower the stress. In other situations, there is something you can do about the problem. If this is so, get to work.

When you have a string of problems over time, watch out. Take care of yourself. Get support. With stress pile-up, you will be more vulnerable to crisis. When there's heavy traffic on a bridge, you need to increase the supports underneath. Talk with your family and friends about the pile-up and how you feel.

Coping with stress may lead to behaviors or situations that make life even more stressful. Drugs or drinking may change your attitude but may only make the problem worse and get you into more trouble. Make sure that the coping you do is constructive and helps your situation. Learn ways of constructive coping.

**"Nature's way
of managing
stress."**



**"If I don't think about it,
maybe
it will go away."**

**"I get by with a
little help from my friends."**

**"Loosen up and
let go."**

Avoiding a situation or the fact that it exists is a way to delay moving through a difficult time. Not thinking about unpleasant things will not make them go away. Get more information and face the facts so that you can decide what to do.

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Physical fitness and good nutrition help our bodies withstand the stresses of life. It's important to maintain both, especially during difficult times. Take some time to learn and think about fitness and nutrition in your life.

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The biggest favor you can do for yourself is to recognize signs of tension in yourself—backaches, stiff neck or shoulders, insomnia, irritability, shortness of breath, increase in smoking, drug or alcohol use. Be willing to face those signs and learn how to deal with them.

Having the support of others, at any time, and especially in difficult times, is very important. It is the single most effective way of dealing with the stresses of everyday life. Take the time to learn how to reach out—to family members, friends, neighbors, or others.

Focus on something good.

Be part of the solution.

**Turn your I CAN'TS into
I CANS.**

Learn to listen and talk.



People who can help in troubled times:



good friend

teacher

counselor

your parents

friend's parents

coach

minister, priest, rabbi

neighbor

club leader or sponsor
